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A FEW WORDS  
OF  
WARNING TO NEW YORKERS,  
ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF A  
Railroad in Fifth Avenue,  
WITH REMARKS ON CITY RAILROADS GENERALLY, AND  
REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE PASSAGE OF THE  
Broadway Railroad Bill.

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BY CHARLES ASTOR BRISTED.  
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"best people in their best estate to make it permanent and possible."

HENRY WARD BEECHER, (*and several hundred people before him.*)

"What signify your riches, if honor is gone?"

*Address of the Republican Members of the N. Y. Legislature.*



NEW YORK:  
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1868.



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The defective paving of our streets, the still more defective condition of our suburban roads, the utter and deplorable want of anything like those cheap vehicles, which, under the name of *cab*, *fiacre*, *drosk*, &c., accommodate the public of European cities,\* the extraordinary multiplication of omnibuses, and

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\* A city with properly paved streets, suburban roads in good order, and a system of cabs, is at least half a century in advance of ours. In fact, the European metropolises are as far beyond us in all their arrangements for out-door locomotion as they are behind us in their internal arrangements for the supply of light and water.

The absence of cabs or their equivalent in our cities is the astonishment, and unless he happens to be a very rich man, the consternation of every foreigner; it is the daily regret of every native who has known by experience what a comfort they are abroad. If our public could only enjoy them for one year, they would wonder how they could have done without them so long. The want of such accommodation is brought more strongly into light by the general cheapness and convenience of our travelling arrangements for longer distances. It is a most absurd contrast that a man returning from a trip of more than a hundred miles, should have to pay, for the transport of himself and trunk two miles from the landing or terminus, as much as the whole previous journey cost him. By those who do not leave the city, the want is equally felt, and exhibited in numerous ways. A cripple or invalid requires an airing, a gentleman has parcels to carry or fetch, a lady requires to keep her clothes clean for a few hundred yards distance in bad weather. There is no resource, in any such case, for the non-carriage owner, except the lumbering, expensive "hack."

This want greatly interferes with popular amusement. In Europe, rainy weather is the harvest-time of the theatres. Parisian caricaturists represent their managers praying to St. Medard (the French *Jupiter Pluvius*), or cursing the sun. But here a stormy night is the tolerably sure antecedent to a thin house, because the transport to and from the theatre costs two or three times as much as the price of admission. Omnibuses and railroads are of no use on such occasions to any but those who live on the direct line of them, for two streets, in a storm, are as bad as two miles. Persons who do brave the weather under such circumstances, are obliged to sit the whole evening in uncomfortable and ungainly costumes. A native artist has depicted the pit of a fashionable New York theatre filled with men

the still further deterioration which they inflict on the pavement; all these causes have rendered the horse railroad or tramway a public necessity to many of our great thoroughfares, both in and out of town. On any large street or avenue not principally occupied by first-class dwelling-houses or first-class places of business, wholesale or retail, the railroad is probably the best expedient for the public accommodation that can be devised with our present means and appliances. On the routes which connect populous but unfashionable quarters of the city with suburbs of the same description, it is very possibly the best means that could be devised under any supposable state of things.

The case of the 8th Avenue Railroad offers a good illustration. For some time during the last and the present year, the inhabitants of Carmansville were as anxious to have a railroad as the inhabitants of Broadway and the Fifth Avenue were not to have one. The reason is obvious. The roads from Central Park to Carmansville, and the parts adjacent and beyond, are, during the greater portion of the winter, but one remove from impassable. Omnibuses flounder heavily through the mud, at the rate of about two miles an hour. Even private vehicles find the transit long and unpleasant, so that the owners of private vehicles living at Carmansville prefer not to use them on such roads in bad weather. A large European city would naturally be connected with a suburb at that distance by roads kept in tolerable condition all the year round; but our climate, to say nothing of other causes, puts such a happy state of things out of the question. An extension of the Eighth Avenue Railroad was therefore a necessity to the dwellers in that

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in California boots and mackintoshes, and the caricature is scarcely beyond the reality.

The establishment of cabs would tend greatly to bring to their proper level the three interests whose combined influence has hitherto prevented this great public benefit—the omnibuses, railroads, and livery stables. As many persons, even of those going daily to business, would prefer taking cabs if they could, and only go by omnibus or railroad because they have no other choice; the cars would be less crowded and more pleasant to those who in all cases prefer them, and the vast number of omnibuses might be somewhat diminished. The “hacks” would also be limited to their proper place as a conveyance for families or large parties.

district. The Third Avenue is a case even more in point, though the railroad upon it is so badly managed (for all but the stockholders), that much of its utility is lost. Within the city streets like Hudson and Centre are of the class eminently proper for railroads.

Unfortunately, the immense profits made by some of the earlier lines, aroused the spirit of greed and speculation, so that longing eyes were cast upon every important thoroughfare, and railways were laid, or attempted to be laid down in all sorts of places, proper and improper, till the abuse culminated in the bill passed at the last session of our Legislature, commonly known as the *Broadway Bill*, but which ought really to have been entitled, *An Act for the prevention of vehicular Locomotion otherwise than by Railroad in the City of New York, and for placing the monopoly of Passenger Carriage in the hands of certain individuals not herein enumerated.*

The certain result of a misplaced railroad, *the destruction of a first class thoroughfare*, is not a matter of theory and reasoning only. It is a matter of observation and fact before our eyes in the case of the Second Avenue. No man having an intelligent interest in municipal improvement, can reflect what that avenue began to be, and what it now is; what its capabilities were, and how they have been destroyed, without a positive feeling of sadness. The lower end of it was already built up with some of the finest houses in the city. Higher, it passed through Jones' Wood, and in the vicinity of beautiful views on the East River and the Sound. It was well calculated to be one of the first streets in this or any other city. But, most unfortunately, simultaneously with its extension, a railroad was laid down on it. From that moment, its improvement stopped, and only houses of an inferior class have since been erected there. Parts of it are little better than a wilderness, and almost out of the pale of civilization. I have seen a dead horse lie for two days below Fortieth street.

The great amount of passenger traffic on Broadway naturally excited speculative cupidity. Accordingly, more than ten years ago, an attempt was made to plant a track there. At first, the proposition was received with vehement outcry, not only from

and the property-holders and lessees on the street, but from the whole town. The press, which, when let alone, and not previously manipulated, is a very fair index of public opinion, spoke stoutly against it. And indeed the objections were so strong and so natural, that it might not unreasonably have been hoped the matter was to be disposed of once for all, after one discussion. But the stake was large enough to warrant repeated effort. The press might be made safe, and the Corporation also, or if the Corporation could not, the Legislature might; the proprietors might be bullied or worried out of their opposition, and even the general public, seeing the inconveniences which arose from the multiplicity of omnibuses, might be persuaded that a railroad was a less inconvenience.

A crowd of vehicles in Broadway is a necessity. Any such thoroughfare in a great and wealthy city *must* be thronged, and particularly in an American city, where the tendency to pedestrianism is so limited,\* must there be a great number of omnibuses or their substitutes. The City of London is at least as crowded as the lower part of Broadway; the Boulevards of Paris are at least as crowded as the upper part.

But admitting the vehicular encumbrance to be an evil, the first question naturally is, Will the establishment of a railroad in Broadway remedy this evil, or will it increase, and greatly increase, the confusion?

As we look for an answer to this question, the first thought that strikes us is, a difference between the two systems, which may thus be expressed in language sounding somewhat Hibernian-like and paradoxical, but nevertheless conveying a very positive truth. The omnibus is only in the way of other vehicles *while it is there*; the rail cars are always in the way, *even when they are not there*. The rails are a perpetual encum-

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\* In view of the crowd of foot passengers on Broadway, this assertion may appear strange. But the throng of pedestrians there is much less in proportion than that on any European thoroughfare of equal reputation and importance. And the side streets in the upper part of the city seem positively deserted to any one familiar with corresponding London or Parisian localities.



brance and impediment. This will be treated of more fully in in another place, where it comes in more weightily ; in the present context we need only glance at it, for the more important thought which next suggests itself is, that the cars will *always* be there. A number of cars sufficient, or nearly sufficient† to take the place of the existing omnibuses, would form an almost unbroken line ; that is, the space between two cars going down would be nearly filled by a car going up, and *vice versa*. Now and then a vehicle of some description might run the blockade diagonally, but there could be nothing like a general circulation across the rails from one side of the street to the other.

Now Broadway, notwithstanding its name, is not a particularly wide street. (It is mortifying to repeat so many truisms and platitudes as one is obliged to do in this discussion, but there is no help for it. If a man will assert or imply that two and two make five, or that black and white are substantially the same color, you must prove the very obvious negatives.) Its average width falls short of forty feet, so that after taking out the seventeen necessary for a double track, there would be barely *twelve* on each side, (in some places less than ten); this is not sufficient to allow vehicles to pass one another ; consequently, all carts, wagons, and carriages, would be obliged to follow, in "Indian file," down on one side, and up on the other side.

It may be asked, however, Is not such an arrangement possible? Does it not (*minus* the central rail) virtually exist in portions of that strangely unimproved and overcrowded region, the *City*, or business part of London?

Leaving out particular exceptions, such as the cross current at Fulton street, which would become utterly unmanageable, we shall soon be able to answer the question by looking at the

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† We might even assume that a greater number would be required, as the advocates of a railroad have asserted that the present omnibus accommodation is insufficient. Judging, however, from experience elsewhere, deficiency is more probable than excess.

constitution of Broadway, that is, the nature of the houses upon it.

Formerly private buildings occupied the upper and lower ends, and fashionable "retail establishments," or, in one word, shops, the middle. As the private houses were transferred to other streets, the shops took their place, and these in their turn have been partially supplanted at the lower end by "wholesale establishments," or stores. Broadway is now, therefore, a street of first-class shops and stores, the stores gradually encroaching on the shops, and driving them up-town. The beauty and cost of many of the buildings erected for these purposes are too well known to require any detailed comment.

It is essential to the success of both classes of establishments that there should be room for vehicles to stop at their doors; carts, express wagons, &c., before the stores, private carriages before the shops. They must stand *there*, in Broadway. The side streets are not wide enough to accommodate them.

If, therefore, you prevent vehicles from stopping in front of the houses on Broadway, you put the occupiers of both stores and shops to great inconvenience and injury; you utterly destroy one of the principal advantages they derive from being on Broadway, and diminish the value of their fee-simples and leases in proportion. No wonder that owners and occupiers have risen ten times and more, as one man, in opposition to the measure.

The interest of the property-holders on a thoroughfare is naturally entitled to much consideration in any matter affecting the thoroughfare. As regards the opening of new streets, their rights are established by law in a manner which shows how respectable those rights are. And without pretending to assign mathematically the exact amount of weight due in every case to such an interest, we may safely say that it is a very important one, which should never be ignored or neglected on vague or hypothetical grounds. There must be strong and unanswerable motives of public utility to set it aside. What are these in the present case?\*

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\* With all possible desire to represent fairly the arguments in favor of a Broadway railroad, I have not been able to find them. *Some* must have been used

A Sunday newspaper, which was in for a handsome share of the booty, and in whose columns, if anywhere, one might expect to find the railroad's case ably set forth, declared that it was necessary for the "poor seamstresses and laborers," who were compelled to go on foot or put up with overcrowded omnibuses.

Now, in the first place, while the laboring classes have a perfect right to demand that their interests and conveniences shall be consulted, and largely consulted, it must be remembered that they are not the only class in the community whose claims are to be considered. That a certain measure would benefit the laboring classes, does not prove the necessity for its adoption, unless we can also be shown that it does not involve injury or injustice to some other class in an equal or greater degree. If every man with above \$10,000 a year were assessed one thousand dollars in order to furnish the laboring class their omnibus or other transportation gratis, that would doubtless be a great benefit (for a time at least) to them, but it would be a most unjust and unwise enactment notwithstanding.

There is but one Broadway, but there are several ways of getting up-town. If the numerous Broadway omnibuses are not sufficient for the locomotive public, they can, by a slight deflection on either side, take refuge in the Bowery or Sixth Avenue cars.

But is it certain that after all, passengers would be better accommodated by a railroad than they are by the omnibuses?\*

The tendency of monopolies is certainly not beneficial to the

before the Legislature, but for all persons unable to be present at Albany, and hear for themselves, they are a sealed book. It is really most astonishing and lamentable that the transactions of our Legislature, in every sense more important than those of many European kingdoms, should pass so unnoticed by, so all but unknown to the public. The city papers barely allude to them; the Albany papers give the briefest possible heads of the speeches; and this in the most reading and speech-making country in the world! There certainly ought to be at least one Albany paper which should give something like a full report. One would suppose such a journal might find patronage enough to support it among the members themselves. It certainly is not the custom of American legislators to hide their light under a bushel. Do ours love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil?

\* Of course we suppose the omnibuses to be removed. The state of Broadway with a railroad *and* omnibuses upon it, would not only beggar description, but defy imagination.

public. In certain rudimentary stages of society, they may be a necessity, but as civilization advances, the principle of competition (though like all other principles, subject to abuse) is admitted to be the most suitable, and the most conducive to progress. And this is particularly the case with regard to passenger conveyance. Let any one man or set of men get the monopoly of an important and valuable line of travel, and you are certain before long to hear complaints from the public. The city railroads are no exception to this rule. Though our public is the most patient to be found in any constitutionally governed country, strictures on the management of the Third Avenue, the Eighth Avenue, and some other roads, are continually finding their way into the papers. That the accommodation on the first-mentioned route is miserably inadequate, has long been known to everybody who ever has occasion to use it. We must remember, too, that on some of these avenues the railroad has not yet an exclusive monopoly, omnibuses also running upon them, and we may add that some of them are better able to hold both a railroad and omnibuses than Broadway is to hold a railroad alone. The plain state of the case is this: *theoretically*, a railroad is more convenient than an omnibus—that is, it would be under proper regulation; but, practically, the omnibus is the more convenient, because it cannot hold many more people than it was built to hold, whereas the number that can be made to stand up inside of a car, and hang upon the steps, is almost unlimited.

Nor is this a question of comfort merely. It is one of health. Standing up in a rail-car is not only one of the most fatiguing, but one of the most injurious methods of locomotion. It tires more than walking, and the fatigue which it occasions is not, like that of walking, any benefit, but quite the reverse. It is well known that conductors and others obliged to stand up and walk about much in cars, are liable to peculiar and distressing diseases. A very appreciable percentage of the men habitually going down town are such as, from the broker to the out-door clerk, have to be on their feet for a considerable part of the day. These take the omnibus, not so much to save time—for it hardly saves them five minutes in two miles—as to avoid fatigue at first, and begin the day fresh, and they gladly have recourse to it at the end of business hours, when they are

ragged with running about. It would be a serious annoyance and harm to them if they were exposed to the risk of having to make the transit both ways standing up in cars.

There remains, then, only the question of price. Let it be admitted that cars in Broadway would carry passengers for one cent less than omnibuses do. (It is said that they *might* carry them three cents cheaper, but most of the propositions made assume five cents as the fare.) Now, quite a number of the habitual omnibus-goers are substantial citizens, to whom the sum of two cents a day is no object. Suppose, however (what I by no means regard as certain), that the majority of the omnibus-goers in Broadway are "poor seamstresses and laborers," and other persons to whom the difference of a cent in each fare is an appreciable consideration. The question is, whether for the sake of saving persons of this class twelve cents a week, *or an additional walk of two blocks daily*, we ought to spoil one of the streets of the world.

I say *spoil* it ; and here the subject begins to take a wider range. The supporters of a railroad in Broadway have presented the question on much too limited a scale, as if it were merely between the property-owners on one hand, and the public, *i. e.*, that portion of the public requiring continual vehicular conveyance through the street, on the other. But *the public* in a much larger sense is interested. The man who does not own or rent a foot of Broadway property, and who never rides in a Broadway omnibus, has his voice in the matter. All the citizens of New York are interested in preserving one of the beauties, one of the attractions, one of the traditional glories of their city. Such is Broadway. However exaggerated its merits may have been (as those of our lions, material or intellectual, are not unapt to be), it certainly deserves and maintains a position among the A No. 1 streets of the civilized world. It is not merely a means of communication between Wall street and the up-town squares. It is a place to lounge in, and shop in, and look at shop-windows in. There is a story told of an English college tutor that, seeing some under-graduates collected on a bridge behind the college where there was a fine view, he went gravely up and informed them that "a bridge was a place of transit and not of lounge." To borrow the language of this pedant, we may say that Broadway is a place of lounge as well

as of transit, and that, except at two periods of the day, it is more a place of lounge than of transit.

It is a *show street*. And such streets are of immense, of indispensable advantage to a city. It can scarcely be a city without some of them. Indisposed to pedestrian exertion as we nationally are, everything that entices people out of doors on their feet is a public blessing. Violently occupied in business of some sort, as most of us are, and compelled to pass much of the day in uncomfortable streets, it is most desirable that there should be, within the business limits of the city, one thoroughfare which affords a promenade not absolutely disagreeable, and that the citizen should not be driven out of town to find anything like an approach to relaxation and out-door amusement.

But the moment you put a railroad on a thoroughfare, you ruin it as a show street. The unsightly lines of iron destroy all its beauty even when, as on Sundays, they are unoccupied. In an artistic point of view, it is as much spoiled as if you erected a large batch of the ugliest possible buildings in it. We have seen how the stoppage (and thence necessarily the circulation), of private carriages would be rendered impossible by a railroad in a street no wider than Broadway. Crossing would also be even more difficult than it now is for foot passengers, and the rails would be a very appreciable inconvenience to citizens or soldiers marching in procession. But the great point is, that the railroad immediately stamps a character on the street. As soon as the monotonous bells of the constantly recurring cars begin to jingle up and down it, it is marked, to borrow our Cambridge tutor's language again, as a place of transit and not of lounge, a place through which, and out of which, it is one's business to pass as soon as possible. There will be little inducement to keep up the elegant stores and warehouses which now adorn it, and certainly none to build new ones. Broadway becomes merely a thoroughfare, like the Bowery or the 6th avenue, and nothing more. Its growth above 40th street, *as a first-class street*, is effectually checked.

These mischiefs would seem quite sufficient for any set of men, however tempted by greed of filthy lucre, to aim at effecting in their day and generation. But as if they were not

enough, the concocters of the measure popularly spoken of sometimes as the *Law* bill, and sometimes as the *Peter Griese* bill, went much further. As a mere incidental detail of their scheme, they were to complete the ruin of the city as a tolerable place of residence, by acquiring the right to construct a railroad on the Fifth avenue. This monstrous proposition was so be very incidental, so adroitly implied rather than expressed, that but for the vigilance of one public-spirited citizen, it might have escaped notice altogether; yet it was really more important than the main staple of the bill, more iniquitous to individuals, more injurious to the public and the city.

That these expressions are in no respect exaggerated, will be evident when we consider the double character of the Fifth avenue—first, as a place of fashionable residence; secondly, as the general outlet for private vehicles going to the Central Park and the upper part of the island.

The mischiefs which a railroad in the Fifth avenue would inflict on the residents there as householders, are so obvious, and in many respects so analogous to those which a railroad on Broadway would inflict on the owners and occupiers there, that we may pass them over to save time and space—the more readily because, great as they would be, they sink into insignificance before the harm done the avenue as a thoroughfare for private vehicles.

Having been much abroad at a time when absenteeism was greatly in vogue, I made it my business to investigate its causes, not merely from curiosity, but believing that such a study might possibly be of advantage in a public point of view. Some Americans gave me one reason, some another, for preferring a European residence; but there was a point on which every man, woman, and child agreed, namely, that as our cities increased in size, American city life was becoming intolerable for want of a pleasant communication with the country, or a substitute for country within reasonable distance, such as the parks and suburban promenades of all European cities afford. At length, not a moment too soon, New York became sensible of her deficiency, and the Central Park was instituted. While it was designed to prove, and has proved, a great benefit and luxury to all classes of citizens, one of its principal and peculiar

aims clearly was to furnish the wealthier portion of the community with a place where they might ride and drive in safety and comfort, without journeying half a day to look for it. We might say that one reason for founding the Park, was to make it worth while to keep a horse or carriage in New York. And the great improvement in the style of our equipages since the Park was founded, notwithstanding the troublous times that beset us, shows that the reason was a good one.

But if, now that the Park is established, those who wish to ride and drive there, and who do not live in its immediate vicinity (which as yet very few do), are to be deprived of all safe and convenient access to it, much of its value is lost to them, and the city will have gone to much expense in vain, so far as one of the classes whom the Park was especially intended to benefit is concerned.

The Fifth avenue is the only main egress available for vehicles going to the Park, and further.\* It is not a very wide street. It allows four carriages abreast at most. It is open to hay-carts, baggage-wagons, and other moving incumbrances, though (happily) as yet not *much* overrun by omnibuses. Now, a railroad in any street, were it as wide as Fourth avenue near Twentieth street, renders it so dangerous as a general and crowded thoroughfare for carriages, that it becomes practically useless. It is not merely that all freedom of divergence from a straight line is hampered, that wheels are instantly denuded of their paint, springs broken, and valuable horses injured; the loss or delay are bad enough, but they are nothing to the danger. It is not possible to drive accurately across a railroad except by taking it nearly at right angles. The wheels are caught, the vehicle is dragged, and collisions cannot be avoided. Omnibuses and carts do not mind such trifles; they are made partly to be

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\* I consider this statement literally true, for both Madison and Seventh avenues are threatened with railroads. Even were these left free, however, the former does not begin soon enough, and the latter (supposing it decently paved, which it is not) is too far to the west to answer the purpose. The eastern position of Lexington avenue renders it equally inappropriate. At the same time, if the railroad epidemic spared these avenues they might do service in relieving the Fifth, but all three of them together could not take its place.



bumped against one another, but private carriages are more easily injured, and serious accidents would be continually taking place.

Any one who wishes to observe the effect of a railroad upon carriages meeting it at a small angle, even in a wide space, and where there are no cars on the track, need only stand in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel any fine day between three and six P. M. He will soon remark how the vehicles passing along the avenue are obliged to check their pace and diverge from their direct course in order to meet the rail at a larger angle than that of the two thoroughfares. The amount of space near the intersection of three streets prevents any serious danger, and keeps the way open, but what the result of compressing the manœuvre into a single street would be, forces itself on the least attentive spectator.

The number of private vehicles in use in our city is estimated at 5,000. We may assume each carriage on an average to be habitually used by three persons; this gives us the number of 15,000, comprising most of our wealthiest citizens and largest tax-payers. But when we have added these to the avenue proprietors we are not at the end of the parties interested. All the side-street property near the avenue is proportionally affected. Nay, it is not too much to say, that *every owner of a first-class dwelling-house* is interested, for whatever renders the city less desirable as a residence for a man of property, diminishes the value of all first-class dwellings in it.

(It may be said that some of the interested parties are twice enumerated, as most occupiers of first-class houses are also carriage-owners. But this does not really weaken the case, for if the number of the class injured is thus diminished, the injury done them is intensified by the double attack on their pleasures and their property. It may also be said that the statement is an exaggeration, because some prominent persons concerned in these railroad invasions are owners of valuable houses and horses. But this only tends to prove what we shall have occasion further on to examine more in detail, that of all quasi-aristocracies a *parvenu plutocracy* is the most dangerous. The successful speculator is too apt to regard neither the rights of the class from which he sprung, nor those of the class into

which he has made or is trying to make his way. The gentleman born and bred values certain class luxuries so much that he would not sell them for money any more than he would his honor or his conscience; the plutocrat will sacrifice not only the public interest but his own pleasures for an 'accession of fortune.)

The Fifth avenue is also a *show street* like Broadway. Its reputation in that respect is equally world-wide, though its origin is so much more recent. The *whole public* have, therefore, an interest in keeping it up, as they have in keeping up Broadway; and its growth as a first-class street, like that of Broadway, would be stopped at Fortieth street by a railroad.

Against all this what possible public benefit can be set off? It will scarcely be seriously alleged that any persons living, or doing business in the Fifth avenue, are not able to pay six cents for an omnibus ride. Perhaps during the comparatively few days in the year, when "the ball is up," some of the skaters might find a Fifth avenue railroad convenient. Then, to be sure, there are envious persons who would be glad, out of pure spite, to deprive men richer than themselves of their favorite amusements, or ruin any street which is the abode of wealth. But this malignant and dangerous spirit, instead of being pandered to, ought by every possible means to be discouraged. I fancy our workingmen have too much common sense, setting aside other motives, to be generally influenced by any such feeling. Knowing that their own children or grandchildren may be rich, they can hardly wish to make the city uninhabitable to rich men; and they can see the simple equity of giving the "Upper Ten" *one* outlet from town, while the general public has half a dozen.

Indeed the idea of a Fifth avenue railroad is in every point of view so unjust and absurd, that we may suspect one idea of its projectors was to have a hold on the property owners there, and a constant means of blackmailing them. Such a privilege might be made to yield a large income to the grantees and the members of the legislature.

But some one may say, "You are knocking down men of straw. Who wants to put a railroad on the Fifth avenue against the wish of the residents? Did not the movers of the bill with-

draw that clause? Did they manifest any serious intention to press it? Has any one strongly advocated the measure?" To which I reply, that I am not so sure of all this. Experience rather points the other way. Has not the opposition from Broadway been equally unanimous, and was not the Broadway bill passed notwithstanding? Is not the idea of a railroad on Madison avenue almost as absurd and unjust, and yet have not the residents there been fighting for their lives one may say—for their property and comfort certainly—against the Harlem Company? Are there not rails laid down in Fourteenth street, threatening to render the opera all but inaccessible next winter? Nay, has there not been already another attempt to establish a railroad on the Fifth avenue,\* making two within twelve years? The greed of speculators has been so excited by the profits of city railroads, that they would run a tramway through Paradise, if they could.

The questions of railroads in Broadway and the Fifth avenue concern—both in a high degree, the latter in the highest—every man who is interested in the beauty, glory, and prosperity of New York, whatever his political party, whatever his views of national or local politics. It is for every man's interest, whether he call himself Republican, war Democrat, peace Democrat, or what not, that this metropolitan city should not degenerate into a vast squalid suburb,† with every available thorough-

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\* In connection with the scheme for widening Thompson street. This movement was started in 1851, and did not receive its *quietus* till several years after.

† If any one wants to see what a city or town should *not* be, let him look at Brooklyn and take warning. It is the perfect model, the very pattern of what ought to be avoided in laying out a town. I can conceive nothing more deplorable, more unsightly, more uncomfortable, more unfit for the residence of any people having a desire or a pleasure beyond the grossest material wants, than that anomalous collection of houses founded on the villages of Brooklyn and Williamsburgh, which extends over the Long Island shore of the East River through Green Point to Hunter's Point in one direction, and I know not how many places in half a dozen others, with its long, narrow, thoroughfares monopolized by railroads, and every street and lane, long or short, for miles inland, paved with the detestable "cobble-stone," in most cases, ten or fifteen years before there was any necessity for paving them at all. Carriage communication is so inconvenient as to be virtually abolished within the limit of some leagues. It is impossible for instance to go from Hunter's Point to Bedford direct in any vehicle with the slightest

fare in it disfigured and encumbered by tramways, a place to hurry through, not to stop in. Most of us hope and believe that after a greater or less number of years' hard fighting, the rebellion will be extirpated, and the Union restored. In that case our city will soon overtake the French capital in population, and be only second to the English. It might be made nearly as attractive and comfortable as Paris; it certainly ought not to be made more disagreeable and repulsive than London, which, however dreary for strangers, at least does something for its own population. New York is virtually our metropolis, and the appearance of a metropolis will always be accepted (and not without reason) as an index of the national character. A few of us fear that the reconquest of the South may prove too difficult a task, and that we shall ultimately have to let some at least of the seceding States set up for themselves. In this case we shall have motives of pride as well as interest to keep New York as far superior in beauty and comfort to any Southern city as it must always be to any of them in wealth and population. Some persons (it may not be doing injustice to Governor Seymour to take him as their exponent) go further, and, looking to a more extended separation of the States as possible, believe that, happen what will, the State of New York has resources enough to stand alone and make a very good imitation of a country by itself. And possibly it may, but if so, it will certainly be in a great

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approach to comfort, to say nothing of pleasure. The least uncomfortable and not very much the slowest way, is to walk. Brooklyn has reached that point to which some people want to push New York; all vehicular locomotion in it except by railcars is next to impossible. *And the inevitable result has followed.* Mile after mile, there is not a street, not a part of a street, scarcely a block of houses, which any person having once seen, would stop to look at a second time. The only impression the place makes on you is a desire to get through it and out of it as quickly as possible; and all this has been perpetrated in a spot favored by great natural advantages, for Long Island is a beautiful country, and Brooklyn might easily have been made a beautiful and attractive city. Instead of which, jobbing contractors and railway companies have rendered it something beyond description or endurance.

It may be that the function which Brooklyn performs as virtually one of the great suburbs of New York makes some of these evils unavoidable. So much the worse in that case for the Brooklynites, and so much the more reason why we should not imitate the evils which we can shun.

measure owing to the splendor of the city, making it the principal centre of attraction in the New World. And there are still others, like Mr. F. Wood, who advocate, and apparently with seriousness, the separation of the city from the rest of the State, to form an independent community. Their plan is certainly a startling one, and there is, I believe, no historical precedent for so large a town existing under similar circumstances. Still, in these times of fusion and confusion, it is rash to predict a negative. A French literary man once presented a very gay actress with a very religious book as a birthday gift; on the fly-leaf was written, by way of dedication and explanation of the seemingly inappropriate present, "One never knows what may happen." Augustine Brohan *might* become an Imitator of Christ. So we *may* live to see New York a "free," or at least an independent city. Should it ever occupy that position, it will be more than ever its interest not only to retain all its rich men, but to attract those of other cities and states.

But the gravest part of our subject remains to be examined, something more important than the preservation of any luxury, however innocent or desirable, something weightier than the beauty, the prestige, or the material prosperity in any sense of our city.

I have no hesitation in saying that had the Broadway railroad bill been passed at the recent session of the legislature in the form under which it was first presented, had it received the Governor's sanction and become law, it would have been the greatest blow that liberal and democratic institutions have yet received in this hemisphere. Not another Bull Run defeat—not the grossest conceivable exhibition of incompetency on the part of a high government official—could have done so much harm. Even in the modified form under which it was passed, and squashed as it has been by the executive\* act, its passage *at all* is, and ought to be regarded as a great public calamity.

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\* Governor Seymour reminds me of Robert the Devil in the opera between the powers of good and evil. Whenever a question comes before him on which he can act in freedom from party trammels, his decisions are as patriotic as his abilities are unquestioned. But ever and anon there blows over him an inspiration from Tammany or Mozart, and then he gives utterance to words worthy a Wood, or a Vallandigham, or some being more pernicious than either, if such exist on or under the earth.

Why? Because this imposition on the public, one of the most mischievous and stupendous jobs that ever was jobbed, this bill which, under pretence of accommodating some classes, oppressed others, and injured all, this measure, solely for the aggrandizement of a knot of speculators, was pushed through, *without even the excuse of partisan feelings or interests*, simply and solely by downright and scarcely concealed or denied bribery and corruption. So abominable were the proceedings of the legislature that the interference of the municipal authorities was positively welcomed as a deliverance. That which a few months before would have exceeded the wildest imagination of a novelist, became actual and undeniable fact. Our city fathers were hailed as public benefactors!

I know there are those who will maintain that such a thing ought not to be said publicly. There is a *malus pudor*, a false and hurtful shame that makes respectable men wish to cover up the ulcers of the body politic, as if concealment were cure. If the virtuous and patriotic, by holding their tongues about the corrupt and selfish, could effect a reciprocal abstinence, there might be something to allege in favor of such a course; but when we know that mischievous opinions will always find vent, it were folly to conclude that honesty alone ought to be tongue-tied, and dishonesty suffered to wanton unscathed by reproach.

There is, indeed, one consideration which ought to make every man hesitate before countenancing the charge of pecuniary corruption against any individual or body. This charge has, for many years, been a favorite and much abused instrument, not merely of party, but also of personal controversy. It has been a first resort, as a weapon always at hand and convenient to fling. It has been a last resort when nothing more could be found to say, or everything said had been refuted. It has been used against men and by men whose characters and positions ought to have freed them from even the suspicion alike of incurring and making such charges.

And therefore, we should indeed hesitate, not only before circulating, but even before listening to such charges. But in the present case there is, unfortunately, little room for hesitation, none for doubt. The unanimous and repeated protest of the

parties most immediately affected, the entire absence of any countervailing plea of public necessity or advantage, the value of the franchise to be *given* away (a value sufficiently proved by the fact that a very shrewd and perfectly responsible citizen offered *two millions* for it, which offer was immediately responded to by a company over-bidding him nearly double), the singular list of grantees to whom this right was to be made a present, men who had a name indeed, but whose local habitation it was not always easy to determine ; all these reasons, and more which might be added, show as clearly the correctness of the popular impression which ascribes the passage of the bill to corrupt influences, as if the tariff of members had been publicly quoted in the market. When the country greenhorn, on his first visit to town, takes all the tinsel he sees for gold, all the stucco for stone, and all the "ladies fair and free" for great women of fashion, our pity for him may not be unmingled with a little envy ; but we old denizens of the city cannot go back to his state of childish simplicity.

Indeed, there is only one way that I can see of avoiding the conclusion. If the majority of our Legislature were not corrupt, they must have been so ignorant and unintelligent, that they could not discern the bearing of a measure calculated to spoil the best streets in this city for the benefit of a few speculators. And I know not but this state of things would be even worse for us. For a knave may be a public benefactor now and then, when his interest happens to coincide with that of the public ; but a fool or an ignoramus, in a responsible position, will always be liable to do harm even when he wants to do good.

Nor has corruption stopped at the Legislature. There are grave signs of its influence in other quarters. How comes it that the newspapers which have the largest circulation were so generally silent about this important measure, especially during what seemed to be the crisis of its fate ? It cannot be for a moment supposed that *they* were ignorant of its importance. The inference, I fear, is as inevitable as melancholy.

The most menacing feature of this corruption is its independence of old party ties, showing a general, thorough and complete demoralization among our professional politicians. How-

ever fearful the condition of our municipal government, we had at least the consolation of feeling that it was the work of one party. The Ins were knavish, the Outs, by sheer force of being out, honest. Or if our Legislature, under the control of either party, had shown itself not exactly up to the standard of Cæsar's wife, when some party interest was at stake, we might make allowance for the temptation, and say that there must always be *some* jobbery in every government, under any possible state of politics. But when we see a measure which had no excuse or palliation in partisan necessities, which it would have done any party honor to reject, making its way through both parties by force of pecuniary outlay, we may well be moved by the strongest conflicting emotions, shame, terror, and indignation.

What makes the evil, possibly, not more dangerous, but certainly more disgusting, is the very correct *theoretical* knowledge which these men seem to have of honesty, virtue, and patriotism, and their consequences. A truer, more elevated, more patriotic paper than the Address issued by the Republican members of the Legislature, has rarely been put forth *any where*. Its *prima facie* appearance was most honorable to all concerned in it. Yet, of the very men who set their hands to this document, so replete with maxims of the highest public morality, some knew that they had sold themselves for so much a head, and the rest knew that their colleagues had thus sold themselves. It is enough to make one cry with Sir Peter in the play, "D—n your sentiments!"

It may, indeed, be said that the Republicans, as a party, are innocent in this matter, because a majority of those voting for the bill were Democrats. But I cannot see how that exonerates them. The party having the majority in a legislative body are fairly responsible, not, indeed, for the failure of all the bills which it does not pass, but certainly for the success of all the important and well known ones which it does.

But neither do the Democrats come off innocent on this account. Not to mention the numbers of them that voted for the bill, we may easily see what their pretensions to honesty are worth, by their conduct towards the Speaker of the House. Whether the charges against this functionary were partly true



or wholly false, it is difficult to determine, and not necessary for our present purpose to inquire. Let us assume that they are true, and in what a humiliating position does it place the Democrats! Here is a man, who, by their own statement, has been guilty of flagrant corruption for two years, and that on the most contemptible scale. On one occasion he had offered his vote for so small a price as one hundred and fifty dollars, thus committing a grave offence against the dignity of the Caucasian race, which demands that a white shall fetch *at least* as much as a negro in the market. Yet, with full knowledge of all this, they make him their candidate for the Assembly, and elect him, and it is only when his dishonesty begins to tell against *them*, that we first hear of it. Is not the inference inevitable that we should never had heard of it, had it not told against them?

And they know how to be in the Joseph Surface vein, too, these democrats! The more brutal and rapacious their secret aims, the more sweet and pure their phrases for out-door consumption. To hear F. Wood address what by a most refined irony is called a "Peace Meeting," any one who did not know his antecedents, would take him for the very incarnation of virtue, integrity, and forbearance, a man who never in his life had so much as connived at any act of dishonesty, violence, or oppression, too holy for a parson, almost too peaceable for a Quaker, altogether something too good for this wicked world.

Such worse-than-Jesuitry has an irresistibly sickening effect upon every man brought up with a certain amount of self-respect, and a certain desire to respect his fellow-beings. The most ferocious rant of the English or the Southern press; the filthiest Billingsgate of a Bennett or a Rynders, is charming in comparison with this double-distilled extract of Jonathan Wild, Mr. Squeers, and Dion Bourcicault.

Although legislative corruption is now confined to no party, still its origin is to be traced to party spirit. It followed naturally and logically from the doctrine that a useful partisan of bad character was to be preferred to a neutral or political opponent of good character. Whoever were the men, Whigs, Democrats, or both, that established this rule, they wrought a fearful mischief, and incurred a fearful responsibility. The evil that they did has indeed lived after them.

But some one may ask : "Is not this the mere sentimentality of innocence and ferocity of virtue? A certain amount of dishonesty is as inseparable from the constitution of human society, as a certain amount of profligacy. Moralists and satirists declare against vice ; divines preach against it, yet it will always exist in this world. It may be lamentable, but it is, like war, like death itself, like all manner of evil, part of our imperfect nature." I should not be at all surprised were this objection to be made, for it is a favorite excuse with the Gallio class of mortals who like to let things go as they are going without caring for them ; and the moral nature becomes so accustomed to certain abnormal states, that it ends by accepting them as the legitimate ones, just as bodily organs under the pressure of certain diseases or accidents conform themselves to abnormal modes of action. Some ten years ago, when a French dramatist bitterly satirized the vices of his fellow townsmen, the witty critics of their capitol declared that he was a Don Quixote fighting the windmills of human nature. Any degree of profligacy less than the Parisian, seemed to the Parisian man of the world a Utopian dream.

To this, two sufficient replies are at hand. In the first place, there is a limit, however difficult it may be to assign its exact position, beyond which evils should not be suffered to pass without a vigorous attempt to arrest them. All men must die ; but if there is an unusual and excessive mortality in any district it becomes the duty of both public authorities and private citizens to better themselves in the endeavor to ascertain and remove its causes. To our eyes Parisian vice has passed endurable limits ; to a German or an Englishman, our public dishonesty must appear in the same light.

Secondly : granting that vices must exist in a community, it makes a very important difference *who the vicious are*. It is the old story of *quis custodiet ipsos custodes* ? If the guardians be corrupt, what security for the guarded ? When we are told in a general way that there is a considerable amount of dissipation going on in any large city, we accept the information with comparative unconcern, for the thing is probable, and, in a certain sense, natural enough. But if we were credibly

assured that the judges of the law, and the ministers of the Gospel were the most abandoned profligates among the citizens, we should be horror-struck, and should feel the most serious apprehension for the welfare of such a people, if we were interested in them, or a strong prejudice against them if we were not. The dishonesty of a tradesman or even a merchant is something very different from the dishonesty of a Senator. The one is private and limited, the other public and unlimited in its effects.

If it be further said (and I really should not be surprised at being asked the question) what so great harm does this legislative corruption do, after all, if, on the one hand, it is so far known that those most likely to suffer from its effects can take measures against them, and on the other hand, is sufficiently kept secret not to become a public scandal against us through the world; I answer: that it cannot be kept secret; that its effects cannot be guarded against, and that *these effects tend directly to the virtual overthrow of our liberties.*

However Americans may differ in their politics, however they may vary in their principles, or want of principle, there is one point on which they are, and have been ever since, yea, before America was a nation, pretty unanimous, a *strong sentiment of personal liberty*. They are not like the French, who will give up political liberty for social equality, or an approach to it. Like their Anglo-Saxon relatives, they require a constitutional government; or rather, they have united the Gaul's love for equality to the Saxon's love for liberty, and demand both. Liberty is the watchword of all parties in the tremendous struggle through which we are passing. It has been the chief war-cry of the republicans that the Southerners were seeking to enslave the nation. The strongest weapons of the Government's adversaries are its alleged invasions of liberty by arrests, repeal of the *habeas corpus*, &c. The vilest copperhead who would grovel in the dust before Jefferson Davis, and lick the boots of Slidell, preserves some sparks of this divine *afflatus*, and seeks to persuade himself that his liberties are violated by "the tyrant Lincoln." The very men, whose unholy ambition has covered the land with blood and mourning, try to convince others, and have perhaps succeeded in convincing themselves, that they are fight-

ing, not for the right to tyrannize over a whole continent, but in defence of their own liberty. Under the influence of this feeling, the American people have always been jealous, captiously jealous of anything that seemed to tend, however remotely, to the establishment of class power. It was a favorite and efficient weapon of the old Democratic party against their opponents, whether Federalists or Whigs, that they wished to create a privileged class. A great system of national finance was overthrown, amidst intense pecuniary confusion, because the people suspected it of containing some mysterious danger to their freedom.

But if legislative corruption be accepted as the order of the day, our liberties will soon be at the mercy of the most unprofitable, unmeritorious, unornamental, irresponsible, oppressive, (oppressive because irresponsible) oligarchy that can be devised, an accidental plutocracy of speculators. And the fact that the families of these men could not form a permanent caste, but the members of the class must change from generation to generation according to the fluctuation and distribution of wealth in this country,—this fact would no more hinder their rule from being oppressive than the continual changes of the imperial dynasty of ancient Rome prevented the Emperor for the time, from being a scourge and a tyrant.

There was much truth (however incronguous the ideas of truth and such a person may appear) in Mr. F. Wood's eulogy of "a splendid despotism" in preference to a mean one. And this is particularly true in reference to a large city. When a Napoleon, or even a Rosas, gets hold of a metropolis, he may treat the rights of individuals with very little ceremony, but he sees that it is for his own glory and interest to improve and beautify his capital. But the man whose great business in life is to swell his fortune by fair means or foul, knows as little about municipal splendor as he cares for the comfort of his fellow-citizens. The meaning of the word *aedile* was not included in his education, and the very idea conveyed by the word is beyond his comprehension.

Our national crisis is especially favorable to the designs of these men, as thieves pillage in most security when a house is on fire.

Let it once be established that any man, or set of men, can, by sheer force of money, procure the passage of a bill through the legislature, and venality is consecrated as the ruling spirit of our State politics. From buying the Legislature, it will be an easy step to buying the Governor; if this cannot be done directly, it may be indirectly, beforehand, by buying those who control the party nominations. A few unscrupulous and wealthy speculators will wield the whole political power of the State. Will it be said that party ties are too strong? Alas! much experience has shown that the enjoyment and the hope of plunder are among the most cohesive of party ties, and these will therefore lose much of their force if the plunder is supplied from another source.

Here an exception may be taken. An objector may say, "You are confounding two radically distinct conceptions, the rights of liberty and property. Let the schemes of these men be as injurious, as you say, to the *property* of individuals, or the material welfare of the whole community, still so long as they have no strict political tendency, but are confined to municipal and financial matters, they cannot interfere with the citizen's *liberty*. The man who picks my pocket, or erects a nuisance near my premises, does me a pecuniary injury, but on my liberty he puts no restraint." To this the answer is three-fold.

The first rejoinder has already been hinted at in anticipation. It is indeed a mere truism that the votes of any legislative body on a question not connected with party politics may be independent of their party divisions. But if such votes are habitually and notoriously influenced by corruption, it is rather too much to expect, that we can say to the briber, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no further," and arrest him on the threshold of actual politics. A man remains faithful to his partisan convictions and professions from three classes of motives—First, the purely selfish, of which there are two, the higher one of ambition, prompted by vanity and desire of power, the lower one of emolument, prompted by greed. Secondly, the malignant and spiteful,—hatred of his opponents and desire to injure them at whatever cost to himself and the country. Thirdly, the virtu-

ous, such as honor, truth, patriotism, &c.\* Now, in the case of a venal Legislature, the last class of motives have lost their weight. (There is, indeed, a sort of self-respect consisting in fidelity to party organization, which often survives all other kinds of self-respect and principle; but this feeling would be satisfied by going with the majority of the party, or even a minority large enough to claim that it was the true representative of the party, after it had been bought.) There remain only the other two, and the former of these may be simplified into one motive, since the venal man will value power chiefly as a means of making money. Supply the emolument from another quarter and you have left as the only safeguard of the partisan's consistency, the feeling of spite. Now, though this feeling has certainly been exemplified by various parties at different periods of our history, and especially of late by the "peace democrats" of this State and some others, to an extent which, for the honor of human nature, one would gladly believe impossible, still it is but a frail anchor to trust to against the torrent of universal corruption.

In the second place, liberty is not summed up in free speech and a free press, the right of public meeting and of individual circulation without passports. These are important elements and salient features, but not the whole of it. Any measure which, without the excuse of imperative public necessity, seriously impairs the comforts of any class of citizens is, *pro tanto*, an infringement on their liberties. An act prohibiting the use of private carriages or horses within the city limits, would certainly be considered tyrannical. If the same result is virtually arrived at by indirect means, it is an infringement on the liberty of a large and important class.

*Thirdly.*—Though the rights of liberty and property are *distinct*, they are by no means wholly unconnected. The right to

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\* This is very neatly put in *Knickerbocker's New York*, "who, [the short-pipes] like true politicians, considered it their first duty to effect the downfall of the long-pipes; their second, to elevate themselves; and their third to consult the welfare of the country." A German classical editor (Goeller) was so struck by the truth of this passage, that he quoted it as serious history in his notes to Thucydides!

property is, in some points of view, a much lower one than the right to liberty, as it may enjoy tolerable security, even under an autocratic monarchy, what is popularly but erroneously called a despotism.\* In other respects it is a more important one, as being, in a considerable degree, necessary to the existence of every government between the extremes of despotism and anarchy. But though distinct, they are not, I repeat it, practically unconnected. *Full* security for property of all sorts, (including the workingman's labor, which is his property,) cannot be attained without a very appreciable amount of liberty in the government. Correlatively a government under which property is habitually insecure, cannot be strictly called a free one, however free in theory. Wherever the citizen's property is in constant danger of attack, either from robbers and banditti, or persons connected with the government, or individuals wielding irresponsible power above or beyond the government, he is not free as regards those persons. He will be afraid of them and subservient to them.

We know that the form of a republic may coexist with the practice of an arbitrary government, as was the case with the Roman Empire under Augustus and his immediate successors.

Let us see what will be the extent and the worth of a citizen's liberties, when the State is in the hands of a combination of rich speculators controlling a venal legislature. We will not take the extreme case of a man who has to live by his daily

\* A *despotic* government is one, the ruler (*despotes*) of which is absolute master of his subjects' lives and fortunes; they belong to him, as slaves do to their owner. According to this definition, no civilized government, except, perhaps, the Russian, is really a despotism, even in theory. The other empires are *autocracies*; the sovereign unites in himself directly or indirectly, the executive and legislative functions, and also controls the judiciary; but having once caused the laws to be made, he must act according to their regular process.

Hence it is puerile nonsense to talk about the despotism of Lincoln. It is incorrect even to speak of the despotism of Davis, whose government, if ever definitely established as such, will, in all probability, be a close and severe oligarchy like those of Sparta, Carthage, and Venice.

At the same time we must admit, that practically an autocracy has a constant tendency to run into a despotism, for if the sovereign chooses to violate the law without waiting to change it, there is no one to call him to account, as has been frequently exemplified during the reign of Louis Napoleon.

labor, and can spare none of his time or money on public matters. Let him have sufficient means to be able to devote a little of both to the common interest. A measure is proposed, which, while it causes great loss or discomfort, or both, to himself, is generally injurious to the public, and beneficial to none except the projectors of it. What will he do to stop it? There is a free press, the scourge of, &c., the bulwark of, &c., &c., the palladium of our, &c., &c., &c. He will draw up a statement for the papers. But the most important and largely circulated papers have been made safe already; he can only find access to the columns of such journals, as it has not been worth while to buy or frighten, or partly on account of their honesty have but a limited circulation. Well, he can write a pamphlet; it is not a very great trouble or expense to write and publish one. But unfortunately people won't read pamphlets for the most part, even when given away. When they relate to a great national crisis, are written with uncommon ability, and circulated by associations for the express purpose—given at least two of these three conditions, they may be generally read—not otherwise. Then he and his friends and fellow-sufferers can call a public meeting. If they are unused to the machinery of such meetings, ten to one it will be a failure, and the press may throw cold water on it, or omit to notice it altogether. After all, the effective amount of his privileges as a free citizen comes to this, that he may openly denounce the iniquity of the proceeding to any one who will listen to him. He may say in the streets what a Frenchman or Austrian, or subject of the Pope, may say in his parlor; or he may give vent to his feelings in the columns of some minor journal. He may play Cassandra, and talk to the winds. This is still a certain privilege and satisfaction to himself, however little it may help the public. But are we sure that even this will be left him? May it not be easy for the plutocracy, and their purchased tools, to harass and crush by vexatious suits any individual bold enough to expose their iniquities? I fancy that traces of this may be detected in our city press, and that some important journals have been quite as much scared as—let us say conciliated. But how, it may be asked, is this to be prevented? and unless you can show how it is to be prevented, unless you are prepared with a feasible



remedy, what is all your discourse thus far, but an elaborate prelude to nothing ?

I reply, first, the thorough exposition of an evil or danger *is* a public benefit, even when we can suggest no remedy with confidence. It is the first step in the preventive or curative process. Were the community suffering from the ravages of a pestilence, it would be our doctors' first duty to observe the symptoms accurately, and report the result of their observations ; especially if a portion of the public underrated the extent of the pest, and another portion, in a spirit of fatalism, was disposed to accept it as an unavoidable necessity. The greatest philosopher of antiquity, as reported by his greatest disciple, often conducted the investigation of principles through whole volumes, without arriving at any definite conclusion ; and in modern times it is certain that the skeptical, or let us rather say the investigative spirit (for it is better to use an awkward term than an ambiguous one), has played no inconsiderable part in aiding human progress.

And after we have fully set forth the disease, it is one step towards the discovery of a remedy by process of elimination, when we have found out what is *not* a remedy. A popular journal, which in its time has been particularly malevolent towards rich men, and has probably done more mischief than any other newspaper, in the way of exciting and maintaining class feelings, now wishes to put the responsibility of all railroad, and other similar swindles, upon the *laches* of our most wealthy citizens and largest property holders. It asserts that to look after the interests of the city is their particular duty, and that in this duty they are and have been remiss. Now, while we may admit that these large property holders have not always done their *full* duty, sometimes through fear of incurring unpopularity, sometimes through despair of effecting anything, it would be a scandalous injustice to hold them responsible for all the blindness, dishonesty, and other shortcomings of and in the community. In the first place we may ask, have these poly-millionaires a monopoly of virtue and intelligence? Are we to assume that the bulk of society is so corrupt or ignorant as not to be able to act properly without their guidance? If so, I fear the chances of public virtue and prosperity are very bad.

Such a state of things might endure in an aristocracy, but in a democracy like ours, it is obvious that the richest class alone is utterly unable to inspire the masses with intelligence and virtue, if these qualities can be derived from no other source. The whole idea is as insulting to the community at large, as it is Manichean and disheartening in its tendency.

Next, the very fact of an openly concerted movement among large property holders, *as such*, would be sure to attract public suspicion and odium. Let it once be known, that Mr. A, Mr. B, Mr. S, and other men of large fortune, have joined to promote or oppose any measure, and there will certainly be a great outcry about the perils to society from the insolence of wealth. Nor would such a feeling be so unjust as many analogous displays of popular temper are. It is precisely the intrigues and combinations of some very rich men, that have brought about some of the evils of which we complain, and are threatening to bring about others.

Men of great wealth have, and must have, a certain social influence. Whether this influence is too great, is a question that we need not discuss; it would be foreign to our purpose. But, politically, the reputation of their fortune gives them no influence or *prestige* beyond any other citizen. If they wish to acquire political influence by means of their wealth, they must do it by directly employing that wealth to affect political issues—in plain English, by bribery—*which is the very thing we wish to prevent*. Doubtless they are often tempted to do so for what seem to them good and necessary ends. It was frequently said, and said in print too, while the Broadway bill was pending, “If Mr. S wants to stop this bill, why doesn’t he distribute half a million or so among those in whose hands its fate lies?” It is this system, so justly denounced by the Governor, of making one wrong serve as a precedent for another, that has, as much as any assignable cause, demoralized the country. If one party nominated an “available” instead of a capable man, the other must nominate an available man; if one party had recourse to some unfair technicality, the other must do the same; if one party bribed, the other must bribe. And thus it is that dishonesty has become the rule in public life, and honesty the exception.

No! the matter is one which concerns every citizen and voter that has means enough to supply himself with anything beyond the bare necessities of life, intelligence enough to see that a great city should be something more than a fortuitous collection of mediocre houses, with railroads running between them, and moral perception enough to understand that corruption is the slow poison of liberty. And it will be no excuse for him in this world or the next, that here and there some rich man has failed to do his duty. The responsibility is one, part of which falls on every citizen who has ever, from party motives, preferred a dishonest or doubtful to an unblemished candidate, and it is for every such citizen to go and sin no more in that way lest a worse thing befall him.

*49 Lafayette Place,*  
*June 22d, 1863.*

